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A PLEA FOR THE NATIVES

At this season of the year when owners of newly acquired suburban or country properties become obsessed with the urge to get out and start cleaning up the brush, more desirable native plants are destroyed than at any other time. Burning is one of the most destructive practices, although the indiscriminate and often ruthless cutting and grubbing out of the natives in total disregard of possible landscape potentialities is equally harmful and quite as unwise.

To alert an unknowing public to the folly of such unnecessary destruction and to arouse interest in and respect for this neglected group of woody plant materials, this plea is made in their behalf.

The rather widely diverse character of Chicago area vegetation makes any but a broad survey impractical, in this case one embracing some of the more desirable landscape plants likely to be encountered in the countryside's wooded or semi-wooded areas and in its open fields and meadows. On many properties the only existing woody growth may be confined to fence row or boundary, but even such locations as these often harbor a wealth of native bounty, attractive to look at and well worthy of preservation.

With trees ordinarily commanding more respect than that shown other forms of native vegetation, it is the shrubs and vines which are most likely to be subjected to unnecessary extermination. For in springtime too few of them give any indication of later attractions to show up in such interesting features as subtly colored unfolding new leaves, multicolored blossom, colorful fruit and autumnal foliage brilliance.

The Sumacs, gregarious inhabitants of fence rows and woodland margins seem to be the most frequent victims of promiscuous cutting, and while true they must be kept in check, the flamboyant display their brightly colored foliage puts forth at summer's end together with showy fruit clusters more than entitles them to be left alone. The smooth stemmed Smooth Sumac (*Rhus glabra*) is the species most commonly encountered,

although the taller, densely hairy Staghorn Sumac (*R. Typhina*) also occurs in the area. Gray Dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) is another desirable native occurring in the same ecological habitat as the Sumacs. Noticeable at this season because of a rosy lavender haze which seems to run through its pleasingly undulating twiggy masses, there will later be bronze tinted new foliage, creamy flower clusters (May and June), and cool appearing white fruit on bright red pedicels (August and September). Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) will be found along fence rows, too, scenting the summer air with its immense flattened clusters of creamy blossoms and giving promise of a bountiful harvest of edible black fruit to follow. Another ecological companion, the Hazelnut (*Corylus americana*), is probably saved from destruction by its early catkins, already elongated by late March and hanging like pale yellow fringe from picturesque branches. Everyone is familiar with the flavorful hazelnuts following in the fall. If typical, the same habitat will also reveal the Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), an ordinarily shrubby member of the *Prunus* clan similar in many ways to the Wild Black Cherry. Its flowers are in shorter clusters, however, its leaves broader, its bark dull grayish brown and its fruit more astringent. Preserve it if for no other reason than its attraction to birds.

The Viburnums, versatile and most useful shrubby group, furnishing abundant white flowers, decorative fruit and brilliant fall foliage color, are represented in our native landscape by two common species, the Blackhaw Viburnum (*Viburnum prunifolium*), good looking black fruited inhabitant of roadsides, open woods or forest margins, and the more pointed, shiny leaved Nannyberry Viburnum (*V. Lentago*), whose preference is for the damper sites. Both eventually spread to form sizeable colonies. Generous clusters of round, light green, wafer-like fruits, actually winged samaras surrounding the seeds, call attention in midsummer to another native shrub or small tree often associated with the plants just mentioned. This is the Wafer Ash (*Ptelea trifoliata*), whose three parted leaves of dark green contrast pleasingly with the light colored fruiting clusters. In open woods the impenetrable thickets of the compound leaved, thorny Prickly Ash or Toothache Tree (*Zanthoxylum americanum*) may be encountered, deterring even the most persistent trespasser. Obviously in some locations such thickets would be advantageous. Shrubby plants are in the minority in our open meadows and prairies although several low growers do inhabit such places. One of the most typical of these is the compound leaved Lead Plant (*Amorpha canescens*), densely gray woolly shrub producing spikes of bluish purple flowers in midsummer. Blooming simultaneously is the New Jersey Tea, (*Ceanothus americanus*), dwarf (2 ft.) relative of the Buckthorns, known for its welcome clusters of creamy white flowers. While typical of oak openings, it is also a prairie plant. Several of the Wild Roses, June's contribution to summer's floral procession, are also desirable companions. One, the variable Pasture Rose (*Rosa carolina*), is an erect branched 2 to 3 foot shrub with bright pink flowers from June until mid-August, colorful autumnal foliage change and long persistent scarlet fruit. Another, the Meadow Rose (*R. blanda*), has

glabrous canes, wider leaves and earlier pink blossoms produced singly or in 3 to 5 flowered terminal clusters. Should one be fortunate enough to find a long, arching caned rose scrambling over a fence or climbing up into a nearby tree, guard it with care for chances are it is the Prairie Rose (*R. setigera*), our only native climber. Its single, clustered pink flowers are a feature of the late June or early July landscape, and in autumn its purplish stems and bronzy orange or reddish purple fall color are noteworthy. In moist swampy areas and along the banks of streams or ponds the Red Osier Dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*) is frequently found, making known its presence at this season by the blood red color of its stems and twigs. The later white flowers and fruit, while interesting, are scarcely as spectacular. Several of the shrubby willows frequent the same habitat, and although most of them are inclined to be overly aggressive, the more dwarf types are often worth leaving for their pretty catkins, colorful branches and attractive foliage. Native woody ground covers are scarce, and any owner of moist woodland who discovers beneath his trees decumbent masses of an interesting looking creeper with green interlacing branches and light green deciduous foliage will do well to protect what almost certainly is the Running Euonymus (*E. obovatus*). Typical of the shrubby forms, it puts on an attractive fall fruit display when its warty capsules open to reveal scarlet arils.

In the Northern part of the region, a section including the North Shore of Lake Michigan with its interesting bluffs and ravines, the Waukegan Moorlands, the upper reaches of the Des Plaines River and other areas northwest of the city, an entirely different range of plant material may be encountered. Here there is a possibility of running across such uncommon plants as the colorful Mapleleaf Viburnum (*V. acerifolium*), the fall blooming Witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), yellow flowered Spice-bush (*Lindera Benzoin*), Shadblow or Juneberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*), known for its early foamy white blooms, edible blue black fruit and terra cotta fall color, the supple branched Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*), moisture loving Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) and dwarf Bush Honeysuckle (*Diervilla Lonicera*), all desirable ornamentals worth protecting at any cost. The Southern and Southwestern Moraine and adjoining areas also supports a characteristic flora, differing in many ways from that prevailing locally.

Because of their often entangling habit of growth the native vines are apt to be the first victims of any cleaning up operation. With the exception of Poison Ivy (*Rhus radicans*) (distinguished by three leaflets and white fruit) and perhaps the more rampant Wild Grapes (*Vitis* in variety), there would seem to be no justifiable reason for destroying such fence row or thicket inhabitants as Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*), twining vine whose orange and red fruits are so much appreciated in the fall, Trumpet Vine (*Campsis radicans*), coarse textured compound-leaved climber whose conspicuous orange trumpets announce summer, and the Limber Honeysuckle (*Lonicera dioeca*), distinctive appearing semi-climbing species whose

glaucous leaves sometimes completely encircle the stems and showy fruit clusters. Deeper in the woods occur two other worth while climbers, the Virginia Creeper or Woodbine (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), a high climbing vine whose bright scarlet foliage coloring heralds the approach of autumn even before August is over, usually from the uppermost branches of the tallest tree, and the Greenbrier or Hispid Greenbrier (*Smilax hispida*), a less common tall climber with light green foliage and coarse, very bristly stems. The Woodbine is distinguished from Poison Ivy, with which it is often confused, by five parted leaves and red stemmed blue fruit, and the Greenbrier from other *Smilax* by its larger leaves and more dense spines. Both are worthy of preservation.

The matter of deciding what trees to save is likely to present a more difficult problem than the shrubs and vines, especially when specimens in strategic locations are involved. For, so important are key trees in the landscape scheme that even inferior species are sometimes spared if they happen to occupy positions of importance and can be expected to serve with a reasonable degree of effectiveness, the purposes expected of them. Such cases require individual attention.

The diversity of our indigenous tree population further complicates the situation unless one is well informed as to the respective merits of the various subjects represented. Some genera may be thinned without hesitation, while others should wherever possible be left untouched. In the latter category belong the hawthorns and crabapples, small trees typical of the edge of the forest community. With something to offer at every season of the year, the thorns especially exemplify the ultimate in ornamentals. Snow accentuates in a particularly pleasing way their picturesque horizontal contour and the intricacy of their branch structure, although leafless branches unadorned are equally attractive studies in gray. During May successive waves of snowy blossom supplant the winter effect, starting with the large leaved Downy Hawthorn or Red Haw (*Crataegus mollis*) early in the month and followed later by the smaller flowered more upright Thicket Hawthorn, (*C. pruinosa*) with its twiggy texture and bronzy new leaves, the long spined, glossy leaved Cockspur Thorn (*C. crus galli*) and the umbrella shaped Dotted Hawthorn (*C. punctata*), whose late May blooms bring the season to a close. Hawthorn fruits are an important part of the autumn scene, too, as is the foliage with its interesting coppery coloration. Wild Crabapples (*Malus ioensis*) reveal a similar, though more sturdy picturesqueness, distinguished at this season by stunted spine-like branchlets and light gray bark. In mid May a more familiar feature is in evidence, handsome salmon pink flowers of a delightful sweet violet scent. Fragrance is also a characteristic of the small waxy yellow green apples appearing in the fall, though they are neither showy nor edible. Like the crabapples, the Wild Plum (*Prunus americana*) tends to form dense thickets, spreading in abandon along streambanks, roadsides and in areas where wood and meadow merge. While some checking may be necessary to keep it in bounds, leave sufficient plants to furnish

misty white blossom in early May and tangy red plums in the fall. One of the commonest and most widely distributed native trees of the area is the Wild Black Cherry (*P. serotina*), the only *Prunus* of commercial importance. Whether allowed to grow as an isolated specimen or left as commonly found, a small gregarious undercover tree, it belongs with the desirables. Its pendent white flower clusters appearing later than those of other *Prunus* put on quite a show in late spring and come autumn its branches fairly droop under their load of shiny black skinned fruit. The foliage is noteworthy, too, appearing early and assuming yellow and orangy tones before dropping in late fall. Black Cherry leaves are narrow, dark green and glossy and the bark of young trees reddish brown and satiny smooth. Two other small trees occurring in colonies in various parts of the area are the smooth, olive-gray barked Aspens, the small leaved Quaking Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and Large-Toothed Aspen (*P. grandidentata*), whose leaf margins are, as the name indicates, coarsely toothed. The peculiar manner in which the leaves of both are borne on long, laterally flattened petioles sensitizes them to the slightest movement of air and causes them to flutter or quake in a singularly interesting manner. Their golden fall color is another justification for their protection. In upland woods one will often encounter the Ironwood or Hop Hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), a wiry branched small tree always found growing alone in sunny openings. Dainty catkins in threes, thin light green leaves, fruits in hop-like clusters and shredded bark are the features to look for. Yellow autumn color and foliage which often clings throughout the winter are other qualifications. More uncommon, but none the less desirable, is the Blue Beech, (*Carpinus caroliniana*), another small tree of the woodland understory. While close fitting fluted or muscular bark of bluish gray is its most distinguishing feature, there is much to be said in favor of its attractive leaves of superb red and orange fall coloring, pretty catkins and decorative leafy fruit clusters.

Considering the taller trees, one would expect to spare such predominate subjects as the oaks (*Quercus*), sociable forest giants which are a joy to behold at any season. They are desirable even in immature sizes, showing as they do the same pleasing subtleties of unfolding leaf color, and the same autumnal glories. In addition, it is characteristic of a number of species to retain their foliage all winter long. The shapely Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), shade tolerant tree of rich uplands also warrants protection, as does the American or White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*), late leafing species of purplish fall color fame, the square twigged Blue Ash (*F. quadrangulata*), Shagbark Hickory, (*Carya ovata*), shaggy trunked and with beautiful bud scales, faster growing Bitternut Hickory (*C. cordiformis*), recognizable at this season by its conspicuous long pointed yellow buds and the Basswood or Linden (*Tilia americana*), often multiple trunked tree whose gray twigs are beset with plump red buds.

In lowland woods one is sure to run across other desirables such as the graceful urn shaped American Elm (*Ulmus americana*), often referred to

as our stateliest native, the gray trunked Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), whose branches often show that peculiar disfiguration known as Witches'-broom, Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*), and Honey Locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), thorny trunked ornamental with feathery compound leaves and decorative twisted brown seed pods. A weed tree inhabiting the same association is the Red or Slippery Elm (*Ulmus fulva*), easily distinguishable at this season by its very large hairy brown buds. One should have no qualms about eradicating it whenever it is crowding more desirable trees. The same holds true for the Silver Maple, (*Acer saccharinum*), graceful early blooming species generally frowned on because it is weak wooded and subject to breakage.

E. L. KAMMERER



Wild Crabapples and Hawthorns, small trees of the edge of the forest community, provide one of spring's handsomest blossom combinations.

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